



Wild animals need space to move about and take care of their needs. By giving them that space and limiting opportunities for them to become a nuisance—such as getting into trash (L)—humans and wildlife can continue to coexist.

### Keeping the “Wild” in Wildlife

Wild animals don’t distinguish between natural and artificial food sources. A bear is just as likely to forage from an unsecured trashcan as from a rotting tree stump. Likewise, a deer will readily eat both wild spicebush and cultivated peach trees. The animals don’t recognize your ownership of that trashcan or peach tree. They are simply looking for their next meal.

Nothing works perfectly, but exclusion works the best. Simply don’t give wild animals access to your garbage, your garden, or other temptations.

- ❖ If bears, raccoons or possums are invading your trashcans, store the filled cans in a secure garage or shed. If that’s not possible, use chains or straps to secure the lid.
- ❖ Protecting gardens from hungry deer, rabbits, and groundhogs is more difficult. Deer will leap fences taller than six feet, and will also crawl under fencing material unless it’s secured to the ground. Rabbits and groundhogs complicate matters by digging under fences. The best solution may be a combination of fencing and olfactory repellents, which are available at most hardware and gardening stores.
- ❖ Bird netting protects fruiting trees and shrubs from hungry birds and may also discourage squirrels and deer.
- ❖ Sound can also be used to keep wildlife away from gardens. Position a radio near your favorite plants, and set the dial to your station of choice. The human voices will warn animals to steer clear. But, be warned: Some animals will acclimate to sound more quickly than others. Slow this process by regularly moving the stereo or changing the station.

Here, a doe nurses a fawn that may later be left alone for hours. Avoid the temptation to interfere, as the mother is never far away.

Be Wild! Live Wild!  
Grow Wild!

# Living with Wildlife

by Cristina Santiestevan

Whether it’s a deer in the garden or a black bear in the trashcan, wildlife seems to have a way of making itself known, and sometimes in an entirely unwelcome manner. The invasions of these hungry animals are easier to understand, however, when we remind ourselves that the deer, bear, and raccoon were here long before our homes and towns existed. We are the interlopers, and it is our responsibility to find ways to coexist. This isn’t difficult, and it is often fun.

According to the Department’s bird specialist, biologist Sergio Harding, “The key is developing an improved understanding of and appreciation for wild animals through education. I encourage folks to learn what they can about their local wildlife, how their actions and decisions may positively or negatively impact those species, and the basic dos and don’ts of interacting with wildlife.”

By providing wild animals with space of their own—while also protecting our trashcans and vegetable gardens—we increase the odds that our interactions with wildlife will be positive ones.







Eugene Hester

## Four Animals That Rarely Require Rescue

**Fawns.** Mother does often leave their fawns for hours at a time, relying on the fawn's natural camouflage to protect it from the hungry eyes of predators. These fawns haven't been abandoned—their mothers return regularly to feed them. When the fawns are older and stronger, they will join their mothers as they forage.

**Baby rabbits.** Like deer, female rabbits spend very little time with their young. This is not neglect. Instead, by staying away (except to feed the little ones), the mother rabbit is reducing the risk of predators discovering her babies. Unless the babies appear thin or weak, they are probably fine.

**Young squirrels.** Cute as can be, young squirrels don't look nearly tough enough to fend for themselves. But as long as they are moving without trouble, they are probably fine.

**Fledgling birds.** They seem so helpless—only partially feathered and often clumsy in flight and when perching. But, if the young bird is able to fly at all, then it should be fine. Its parents will watch and care for it until it learns to fend for itself.

## Learn to Recognize When Wildlife Needs Help

Most “rescued” wild animals aren't really in need of rescue, and countless healthy animals are removed from the wild by well-intentioned people every year. However, there are always exceptions. According to DGIF veterinarian Megan Kirchgessner, the most common reasons for veterinary care include vehicle injuries, gunshot wounds, poisoning, and in the case of birds, collisions with windows.

Help prevent injury by staying alert while driving, especially at dawn and dusk when wildlife are most active. Protect animals from accidental poisoning by carefully securing all chemicals. Antifreeze—which is extremely toxic—is especially attractive to animals, because it tastes sweet.

If you find a wild animal that does seem to require assistance, please do not touch or move it. Instead, follow these steps:

1. Observe the animal from a safe distance. Take note of its physical condition, state of awareness, and other signs of injury or illness.
2. Review the information provided on the Department's website and The Wildlife Center of Virginia website. This will help you determine if the animal really needs help.
3. If the animal is in need of assistance, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for guidance. A list of Virginia-licensed rehabilitators can be found on the DGIF website.

Some birds may require nothing more than a little momentary assistance; for example, a bird that is dazed after flying into a window may just need a quiet place to recuperate. Give the injured bird a spot that's safe from cats and other predators, and it may be just fine. Likewise, baby birds (those whose wings don't have feathers) can be returned to their nest without any trouble: It's a myth that adult birds will reject their chicks if they've been touched by humans.

Please note that it is illegal to keep wild animals without a permit. Any animal that requires actual care must be given to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Some species, such as state-threatened bald eagles and peregrine falcons, require specialized care and are taken to The Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro.



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Milkweed attracts many pollinators and butterflies, and is critical to the monarch caterpillar.



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Left, a gray squirrel nurses her young. Above, a bee feasts on goldenrod.



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## Seven Wildlife-friendly Native Plants

**Milkweed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*). These long blooming and easy-care flowers attract native bees and happy swarms of butterflies, including monarch caterpillars which eat nothing else.

**Purple coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*). This summer and fall bloomer bears large purple blooms, which attract native pollinators. The seed heads are irresistible to goldfinches.

**Blazing star** (*Liatris scariosa*). The brilliant lavender-hued flower spikes are irresistible to gardeners and pollinators alike. Plant several of these in a clump for mid-summer color.

**American elderberry** (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *canadensis*). This shade-tolerant shrub bears beautiful white flowers, which are followed by large clusters of deep purple berries. The berries are edible, if you can convince the birds to share.

**Eastern red cedar** (*Juniperus virginiana*). As small to mid-sized trees, red cedars provide year-round shelter for wildlife (and privacy for gardeners). The blue berries attract flocks of hungry birds in the late summer and fall, including the cedar waxwing.

**Rough-stemmed goldenrod** (*Solidago rugosa*). Despite its reputation for causing hay fever (which is really caused by ragweed), goldenrod is actually an excellent choice for a splash of late-season color, nectar, and pollen in the garden.

**Cardinal flower** (*Lobelia cardinalis*). Want to attract hummingbirds? Plant a sprawling clump of cardinal flower and wait for the bright red flowers to burst into bloom. It won't be long before the hummingbirds show up.

Find more suggestions for native plants on the DGIF website:  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat/native-plants-for-wildlife.asp](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat/native-plants-for-wildlife.asp)

Ruby-throated hummingbird on purple coneflower.



## Give Wildlife its Own Space

While wildlife rarely needs to be rescued, it often does benefit from a little human help. In particular, homeowners and renters can readily assist local wildlife—from bumble bees and butterflies to foxes and owls—by maintaining a wildlife-friendly yard and landscape that provide food, water, and shelter. As additional land is developed for commercial and residential uses, these backyard oases become more and more important to our native wildlife species.

Looking to welcome a little more wildlife into your yard? Consider these additions:

- ❖ Native flowers supply ready nectar for pollinators, including monarch butterflies and ruby-throated hummingbirds.
- ❖ Native fruit-bearing and nut-bearing trees, shrubs, and brambles provide food for a wealth of wildlife, from box turtles to black bears.

- ❖ Birdfeeders provide supplemental food for wild birds. Providing high-quality seeds—black oil sunflower, thistle seed, white millet—ensures that birds are eating a healthy diet. Suet is also a good choice, especially in the winter. Be mindful, however, that depending on where you live, such bird feeders may attract other animals—squirrels, deer, and bears, in particular.
- ❖ Water is always welcomed, especially during Virginia's often dry summers. Add a small birdbath or a garden pond. Either will attract birds, mammals, and amphibians for a drink or a swim.
- ❖ Shelter is the final ingredient in a wildlife-friendly habitat. Dense shrubs provide birds with a safe place to build nests, while tall grasses and wildflowers offer shelter to cottontail rabbits, bobwhite quail, and red fox. 🦋

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## RESOURCES

- ❖ Not sure if an animal requires assistance? Observe its behavior and review the information on the Department's website ([www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured)) and The Wildlife Center of Virginia's website ([www.wildlifecenter.org/wp/rescue-advice](http://www.wildlifecenter.org/wp/rescue-advice)).
- ❖ Find a sick or injured animal? Locate a Virginia-licensed wildlife rehabilitator online: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators.asp](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/injured/rehabilitators.asp).
- ❖ Interested in becoming licensed as a wildlife rehabilitator in Virginia? Begin by locating a licensed rehabilitator near you (link above) to discuss the training, time commitment, and costs associated with wildlife rehabilitation. Licensed rehabilitators can provide the education and support you will need when first starting out. You'll find additional information—including a list of classes—on The Wildlife Center of Virginia's website: [www.wildlifecenter.org/wp/rehabilitator-training](http://www.wildlifecenter.org/wp/rehabilitator-training).
- ❖ Curious about starting your own Habitat at Home®? You'll find plenty of information on the DGIF website ([www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat)) and on the website for the Virginia Native Plant Society ([www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org)).
- ❖ Want to learn even more? Check out these books for advice on happily coexisting with wildlife:
  - \* *Kid's Easy to Create Wildlife Habitats*, by Emily Stetson.
  - \* *National Wildlife Federation Attracting Birds, Butterflies & Backyard Wildlife*, by David Mizejewski and Glee Barre.
  - \* *Noah's Garden*, by Sara Stein.
  - \* *Bringing Nature Home*, by Douglas Tallamy.
  - \* *Rescuing Wildlife: A Guide to Helping Injured and Orphaned Animals*, by Peggy Sue Hentz.



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Above, purple finch on bird feeder.



Carol Heiser

Above, elderberry; below, cardinal flower.



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